



Tribune

Picture caption:

Dr. Julio Sumar, left, an alpaca judge from Peru, watches intently as Kim Platt of Madison, Ohio, walks Scott's Royal Gold. Sumar judged the halter competition on both the bone structure and the fleece. Scott's Royal Gold finished first in this round and third overall in his division.

Eagle

Shear-to-shawl event adds style to alpaca show

By Darlene White Natale
Eagle Focus Editor

The Butler Fairgrounds seemed more like a petting zoo than a live-stock showcase last weekend, as hundreds of alpacas were a feast for both the eyes and hands.

Visitors strolled through the barns feeling their coats and marveling at the beauty of the gently animals on display, performing in competitions and being shorn.

Breeders from across Pennsylvania and New York were joined by others from Minnesota, Missouri, Washington, West Virginia and Illinois to show off their prized animals of Peruvian descent.

The show featured a special shear-to-shawl event. Visitors were treated to the sight of an alpaca being professionally shorn and then could watch the fiber changed from puffy cumulus-like clumps into a luxurious shawl.

Chacucha, a soft beige alpaca owned by the show's organizers Laurye and David Feller of Penn Township, was shorn and his coat's delicate fibers were combed to remove impurities before being spun onto spools and then woven into a cashmere-like shawl by the Butler County Spinners and Weavers Guild.

Linda Gross, a spinner from Fenelton, explained that the fiber becomes yarn as you release it from your hand to the spinning wheel.

"It twists and becomes stronger," Gross said.

Wini Labrecque of Cabot, president of the spinning and weaving guild, operated the loom. She said after each strand of yarn is threaded onto the loom, the actual weaving time for the 22- by 76-inch shawl would be about 2 1/2 to 3 hours.

Throughout the day Darren Kennedy, a transplanted Kiwi who resides in Wyoming, sheared alpacas for the breeders. It only took him about 10 minutes to shave each alpaca with a clipper, and the alpacas suffered no discomfort other than having their legs subdued.

Butler third grader Chelsea Rock intently watched the shearing.

"I came out because there was nothing to do," said the youngster clad in soccer gear. "They're (alpacas) really cute with their hair NOT chopped off," she said after watching the Kennedy's handiwork.

Kennedy said the fiber from the torso and upper body called the blanket would sell for \$7 to \$8 an ounce. He said the poorer quality fiber from the legs would fetch about \$2 an ounce. Kennedy began shearing sheep in his native New Zealand and travels the United States shearing both alpacas and sheep.

The reason the breeders traveled long distances wasn't for the shawl making, and though they did appreciate Kennedy's skill, it wasn't to have their alpacas shorn. It was for the competition.

In fact, Dr. Julio Sumar traveled from Peru to serve as the halter and fleece judge. On Sunday while judging the junior youth showmanship category, Sumar announced excitedly that

Scott's Royal Gold, a fawn colored yearling from Madison, Ohio, had the "nicest crimp" he's ever seen. The crimp is the zigzag pattern in the fleece revealed by gently parting it.

Sumar judged the halter class, which looked much like a dog show. He judged half on fleece and half on the alpaca's conformation or bone structure.

Dr. Ruthanne McCaslin of Chardon, Ohio, explained that judges like to see how the animal walks.

"Conformation is their structure. They are judged on balance, length of legs, neck and how they move," said McCaslin.

Sunset Hills Farm Alpacas of Penn Township was the big local winner at the show, claiming six first place ribbons.

Harmony Alpacas of Harmony won a first prize ribbon at the breeder's show.

Kim Platt, owner of Scott's Royal Gold, said that show-quality alpacas usually cost between \$15,000 and \$50,000, though a pet-quality alpaca could be had for \$500 to \$2,000.